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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 112TH INFANTRY (28TH INFANTRY DIVISION)
IN THE HURTGEN FOREST, GERMANY, 2 NOVEMBER - 14 NOVEMBER 1944
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Regimental Headquarters Company Commander)

Type of Operation described: REGIMENT IN THE ATTACK, DEFENSE, AND WITHDRAWAL

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INTRODUCTION

In August and September of 1944 the American Legions which spearheaded their way across France became blunted and had their points turned back when they hit the Siegfried Line, Germany's West Wall of steel and concrete forts, which the German Engineers had built with their usual thoroughness. Thus, due to the over-extended routes of communication and dwindling supplies ^{groups making the} the initial penetrations of the defenses of the "Fatherland" were forced to withdraw in the face of ever increasing opposition. Consequently, the now famous "Pursuit Phase" of World War II was terminated and the coordinated assault phase initiated. (1)

After the fall of Aachen the United States First Army planned an attack early in November on Cologne and the Rhine River. (See Map A) This major attack by VII Corps was to be preceded by a preliminary assault by V Corps on the road center at Schmidt, Germany; securing the high ground northeast and southeast thereof; and seizing two large dams on the Roer River northwest of Gemund. The imperativeness of this mission was based on the fact that the Germans by systematically destroying or controlling the sluice gates of the dams could flood the lower Roer River Valley, consequently placing an obstacle in front of the attacking VII Corps that would be extremely difficult and costly to surmount. It was estimated that the blowing of these dams would make the Roer River to the north impassable from 3 to 6 weeks. (2)

At the ^{concept or beginning} ~~commencement~~ of this attack the front in the zone of V Corps operations was held by the US 9th Infantry Division whose line extended south from Schevenhutte through the Hurtgen and Rotgen Forests. In numerous small operations this division had suffered heavy casualties; therefore, relief for rehabilitation and reorganization was deemed necessary so that the unit could regain its full fighting effectiveness. (3)

(1) A-1, Chap 8 (2) A-1, P. 3-6; A-3, P. 67; A-4, P. 282 (3) A-3, P. 66

THE V CORPS PLANS FOR THE ATTACK

The V Corps plan of operations was presented in Field Order Number 30, dated 21 October 1944, and the supplementary orders and letters of instruction that followed. In this plan the US 28th Infantry Division would relieve the US 9th Infantry Division. The 28th Infantry Division was then assigned the mission of seizing and securing the high ground in the vicinity of Schmidt and Vossenack and establishing contact with VII Corps on the north. The 28th Division would then attack southwest seizing the general line: Lammersdorf - Rollesbroich - Strauch - Steckenborn so that Combat Command "A" of the US 5th Armored Division with the 2nd Ranger Battalion attached could launch an attack from Lammersdorf to capture the Kesternich - Simmerath line after which time the 28th Division would secure it. The reenforced combat command would then mop up all enemy resistance north of the Roer River (See Map B) (4) (SEE MAP B-1)

In the preliminaries of the attack the 28th Division would, after being relieved by elements of the US 4th Infantry Division, move into assembly areas northeast of Rott, Germany, and be prepared to relieve the 9th Infantry Division on the 25 and 26 October 1944 at 1530 hours. The division front line ran north and south with the three regiments on line as follows: 109th Infantry Regiment on the north, 110th Infantry Regiment on the south, and 112th Infantry Regiment in the center. The date for the attack was originally scheduled for the 31 October but was made flexible so as to conform with the ammunition requirements and the weather. While awaiting favorable conditions the regiments were training, consolidating positions, and policing the area of dead and abandoned equipment. The ferociousness of the skirmishes in which the 9th Infantry Division had been engaged was evidenced by the dead who, by their positions, told the story in mute testimony. Paralleling the build-up of men and ammunition, the artillery began indoctrinating the enemy by its program of counterbattery, harassing, and interdictory fires. (5)

(4) A-3, P. 68; A-4, P. 282; A-2, P. 89. (5) A-2, P. 89; A-3, P. 68; A-4, P. 286; Personal knowledge.

THE TERRAIN

In order that the reader may better understand the more detailed description of the action depicted in this monograph it is necessary to digress from the narrative so that a brief description of the terrain in the zone of operations of the 28th Division can be made.

Approximately 18 miles southeast of Aachen the "Forst Hurtgen" spreads itself through rugged terrain for more than 50 square miles. The dense growth of Douglas Fir towers from 75 to 100 feet above the blanket of pine needles which concealed the damp ground. The closely packed trees formed a natural umbrella through which only a few of the sun's rays would penetrate on the brightest days. The Kall River unwound itself through the deep wooded ravines of the forest until it disappeared into the waters of the Roer River. The towns are founded on the tree thinned ridges which rise out of the west end of the forest. The Hurtgen - Bergstein and Schmidt - Steckenborn ridges not only command by observation the Kall Valley and Vossenack but on the north they dominate the beginning of the Cologne Plain, the Roer River and on the south they hold the key to the large Roer River dams; both vital areas in the scheme of maneuvers of the Allied Armies. The road net crossing the Kall River consisted of a few trails that resembled cork screws when viewed on a map. Although the combination of woods, terrain, and road net made an attack through this area not very feasible; control of it was a definite military necessity. (6)

PROVISIONS OF THE ATTACK

It was evident that because of the known hazardous elements of the terrain this mission would be extremely difficult; therefore, in planning it was essential that the following provisions were as thoroughly established as humanly possible before the attack could be launched:

1. Favorable weather was vital since this would be basically an infantry attack and isolation of the local battlefield had to be maintained to prevent the enemy from counterattacking

(6) A-2, P. 89; A-3, P. 167; A-4, P. 288; A-7; Personal Knowledge

with his armored reserves. The intensive studies of aerial photographs and other sources of information by the G-2 revealed no verification of the existence of a road or trail from Vossenack through the Valley of the Kall River to Kommerscheidt; therefore, very little help from friendly armor could be counted on.

2. Artillery would have to be in adequate strength so that it could effectively neutralize the observation and possible artillery positions that would be located on the Hurtgen - Bergstein and Schmidt - Steckenborn ridges, the commanding terrain features in the zone of the attack.
3. To cope with the problem of supply and evacuation, cargo carriers that could transverse the steep sides of the Kall River Valley had to be procured. To overcome this predetermined obstacle the division requested and received 47 cargo carriers, full track, commonly known as "Weasels". (7)

THE DIVISION PLAN OF ATTACK

With three infantry regiments on line, the 28th Infantry Division commander, Major General Norman "Dutch" Cota assigned them the following missions: *(SEE MAP B-1)*

109th Infantry Regiment attacks north to secure the Germeter-Hurtgen road and the adjacent wooded area to the clearing southwest of the town of Hurtgen. Thus in addition to protecting the north flank of the division this objective would serve as a line of departure for the US 4th Infantry Division in its forthcoming attack with the VII Corps.

110th Infantry Regiment attacks south to secure the Kall River west of Schmidt.

112th Infantry Regiment attacks east to capture Vossenack after which time the regiment will change its direction of

(7) A-2, P. 90; A-3, P. 170.

of attack to the southeast on the line Vossenack - Kommer-
scheidt - Schmidt and capture and secure Schmidt. (8)

The enemy order of battle opposing this attack as depicted by G-2 of
V Corps on 011800 October 1944 was as follows:

275th Infantry Division

141st Fortress Battalion

20th GAF Fusilier Battalion

Kampfgruppe Hegelein

275th Fusilier Battalion

1412nd Infantry Battalion

89th Fusilier Battalion

Kampfgruppe Trier

Reserves identified:

Kampfgruppe Brandes

Kampfgruppe Feind

73rd Engineer Battalion

275th Engineer Battalion (9)

The specific course of the attack of the 112th Infantry as decided by
Lt. Col. Carl Peterson, the commanding officer, was without a doubt the most
logical plan that could be conceived under the circumstances of the mission
given in the division order. He was aided in the preparation of the order
by an able staff which included the newly assigned Executive Officer, Lt.
Col. Locket, who had served as a battalion commander in this area when the
US 9th Infantry Division attacked in the early days of October. Thus
after the evaluation of all the available information and after the best
possible solution to the problem of supply and evacuation had been reached
the following plan was given to the subordinate commanders: (10)

The 2nd Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Hatzfield with Company "D" of
the 707th Tank Battalion attached would attack Germeter and Vossenack. Upon
the seizure of the objective the battalion would organize a defensive posi-
tion. The line of departure would be the present front line which at this

(8) A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 286; (9) A-4, P. 280 (10) Personal Letter from Lt. Col.
Peterson, Personal knowledge.

date was approximately 200 yards west of Germeter.

Immediately after the capture of Vossenack the 3rd Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Flood would attack southeast across the Kall River to capture Kommerscheidt and Schmidt. The battalion would then organize a defensive position to secure Schmidt.

The 1st Battalion commanded by Major Hazlett would follow the 3rd Battalion and after the capture of Kommerscheidt the 1st Battalion would move into the town and secure it.

In addition to the neutralization of the key terrain features that commanded the battlefield, the commanders of the battalions of artillery that were in direct support plus the supporting artillery battalions of the VII Corps were ordered to give the attack an artillery preparation which would start one hour before the jump off. (11)

The stage was set for the attack to begin on the 31st of October 1944 but due to unfavorable weather and an inadequate supply of ammunition it was cancelled until the 1 November only to be postponed again until the 2nd of November. Starting on the 29 October the 8th AAF bombed towns in the vicinity but these attacks were hampered by the prevailing bad weather consequently the results were not as good as anticipated. The enemy air effort was confined to night reconnaissance and bombing for which they paid the price of two aircraft which the supporting anti-aircraft shot down. The artillery supported by the attached Tank-Destroyers and Anti-aircraft (90 mm guns) continued active on counter-battery, harassing, and interdictory missions. (12)

THE ATTACK

At 0900 hours, 2 November 1944, after an artillery preparation which lasted one hour the 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry with Company "D", 707th Tank Battalion attached crossed the line of departure and attacked through Germeter to Vossenack. At the same time the 1st Division in the north half of the VII Corps sector attempted to feint the enemy into thinking the attack might be along the entire front by demonstrating with mortars, arti-

(11) A-2, P. 91, Letter of Lt. Col. Peterson, Personal Knowledge (12) A-4, P. 286

llery, and strong patrols but no advance was made. The 2nd Battalion of the 112th Infantry met light resistance in its drive eastward; reaching the northeast section of Vossenack by early afternoon. The two attacking companies set up a defensive position on the forward slope of the ridge while the reserve company mopped up the stragglers and snipers that were by-passed. The enemy's well observed artillery fire took a heavy toll on the companies, reducing them considerably. It was already evident that the artillery was unable to effectively neutralize the enemy observation posts and positions on the commanding ridges because shells were coming into the town from three major points of the compass. The attacking elements reported enemy armor in the town of Schmidt but when this report was forwarded, G-2 promptly stated that only ten tanks were in the vicinity and they were fifty miles away. (See Map C) (13) (SEE MAP C-1)

As the 2nd Battalion initiated its attack, the 1st and 3rd Battalions moved into positions to the rear of the line of departure and made preparations to move to the aid of the attacking battalion should it be counter-attacked. The commanders also made reconnaissances as far forward as the front line for routes of advance; thus enabling them to further refine their attack plans for the following day. (14)

To the north the 109th Infantry had made good progress in their coordinated attack with the 112th Infantry and had succeeded in knocking out 15 "Pill Boxes" and in capturing over 200 prisoners. The 1st Battalion of this regiment had advanced 2700 yards in a drive to the northeast toward the town of Hurtgen but the other assault battalion attacking in the same direction could only gain 500 yards due to thick mine fields and wire obstacles that were covered by bands of grazing fire from automatic weapons. (15)

On the south the 110th Infantry attacked at 1200 hours but immediately encountered heavy artillery and mortar fire along with a strong defensive position consisting of concrete "pill boxes", log bunkers, and bands of defensive wire that was covered with machine guns. Even after the area had been saturated with artillery and mortar fire, the assault battalions were unable to breach

(13) A-2, P. 91; A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 288, A-7, Letter from Col. Peterson. (14) A-4, P. 290
(15) A-2, P. 91; A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 290.

this fortified position. (16)

The preponderance of artillery support on the first day of this attack can be better understood by stating that in addition to the reinforced artillery effort of V Corps the units of VII Corps on the north fired 9000 rounds and the Tank Destroyers fired 952 missions on ground targets. (17)

A total of 306 prisoners were evacuated through the division Prisoner of War cage and identification of the units of these prisoners who were interrogated indicated that no new unit had been moved into this area prior to the attack. (17)

At 0700 hours on the 3 November 1944 the 3rd Battalion of the 112th Infantry launched its attack across the Kall River and with practically no difficulty the town of Kommerscheidt fell to Company "K". The battalion then pushed into Schmidt and by evening the three rifle companies were in the north end of the town. Only a small section of the town had been cleared of enemy when due to darkness the mopping up teams were engaging one another in fire fights; consequently, the battalion commander ordered the companies to stop all forward movement and button up for the night. Resupply of ammunition and rations was accomplished by the use of the full tracked cargo carriers (Weasels). Lt. William George, 3rd Battalion Motor Officer, who had led the supply convoy, attempted to get the "Weasel" towed Battalion Anti-tank guns into Schmidt. When this column was traversing the Kall Valley one of the drivers made the wrong turn and the gun crew was knocked out when it ran into a German road block. (18) *(SEE MAP C-2)*

While the assault of Schmidt was in progress the 2nd Battalion ^{improved} refined their defensive positions east of Vossenack. The observed artillery fire on this position inflicted heavy casualties and cut the strength of the already depleted companies to a point where they would have to have replacements or be replaced. As reinforcements arrived they had to be fed into the line during the action. (19)

In the meantime the 1st Battalion was ordered into Kommerscheidt by the Regimental Commander, Lt. Col. Peterson. Their mission was to secure
(16) A-2, P. 91; A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 290; (17) A-2, P. 91; A-4, P. 290; (18) A-2, P. 91; A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 290; Personal knowledge (19) A-4, P. 290.

the town and to prepare to assist the 3rd Battalion if Schmidt should they be attacked. The Regimental Commander knew that this movement would be the only way he could plug the gap that existed between the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The 1st Battalion was in the process of preparing their defensive position when "B" Company on the south edge of the town became engaged by a force of undetermined strength. (20)

The division plan gave a battalion of combat engineers the mission of making the trail from Vossenack to Kommerscheidt passable to tanks and other supporting trains. This trail was nothing more than wagon tracks, narrow, with many sharp turns that made it almost unusable to anything but light vehicles and they were bogging down in the mud. This project was very slow developing, consequently only 3 tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion were able to cross the valley. (21)

On the north ^{(3) here} at this date the 1st Battalion of the 109th Infantry was counterattacked by a force of approximately 200 enemy supported by 10 self-propelled guns and 2 tanks. The enemy attack was repulsed and the two tanks were knocked out. The battalion was then ordered to defend its present positions. ⁷ (22)

The 110th Infantry on the south attacked with the 3rd Battalion breaching one line of fortifications only to smash into another strong defensive line. The 1st Battalion of this regiment prepared for an envelopment of the enemy's right or north flank by moving through the zone of the 112th Infantry. (23)

The supporting artillery fired every called mission throughout the day with the Tank Destroyers alone firing approximately 3000 rounds on ground indirect fire missions. (24)

Weather again stymied air activity, consequently only a few missions were flown but night fighter cover was given. (24)

THE COUNTERATTACK

On 4 November 1944 the 112th Infantry received orders to hold their present positions so as to protect the east flank of the division. At 0600

(20) A-2, P. 91; A-4, P. 290; (21) A-2, P. 91; (22) A-2, P. 91; A-4, P. 290;
(23) A-4, P. 290; (24) A-4, P. 290.

hours the enemy reaction started with a severe shelling program on Kommer-scheidt and Schmidt with the emphasis being placed on the former. At 0800 hours the enemy attacked with an estimated force of one battalion of infantry supported by 10 tanks but the position held and the attack repulsed. At 1000 hours the second German attack of approximately the same strength struck at the position from the northeast and southeast but the defenders of Schmidt were unable to hold and the battalion was forced to withdraw under pressure back to Kommerscheidt. Entire platoons of "K" and "L" Companies were cut off and although a few of these units got back to Kommerscheidt the majority of them were chopped into small groups and forced to surrender. The three tanks of Company "A" of the 707th Tank Battalion arrived at Kommerscheidt just as the 3rd Battalion started its withdrawal but too late to save Schmidt. Orders to recapture Schmidt, with the time of the attack set at 1500 hours, had to be cancelled when it was realized that the German attack had not been contained. At 1530 hours the enemy attack continued but was stopped before reaching Kommerscheidt by artillery, tanks, infantry, and air support. The three tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion engaged enemy armor supporting the attack and drove them back to the cover of Schmidt. The fighter-bombers on this mission claimed credit for destroying 3 enemy tanks. (25) *(SEE MAP C-3)*

"Later information indicated that the 1055th German Regiment of the 89th Division had been moving through Schmidt on its way to a rest center at Duren just prior to the attack. It was halted and ordered to counter-attack at Schmidt. When supporting weapons arrived, 8 tanks and 4 self-propelled guns, this attack was started; the 3rd Battalion attacked Schmidt followed by the 2nd Battalion, both units received heavy losses." (26)

During the morning of the 4th of November the Regimental Headquarters Company Commander of the 112th Infantry after receiving a two hour enemy artillery message while on reconnaissance recommended that since the Germans were using Vossenack for an artillery impact area it would be advisable to (25) A-2, P. 90; A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 290 & P. 292 (26) A-4, P. 292

either stay in the present command post in the pill box 800 yards west of Germeter or move to the southeast side of the Kall River where the enemy did not have direct observation. The Regimental Commander decided that the command post would remain in the pill box but a small operational group would be organized and move to the east side of the Kall River. The operational group was formed and in the afternoon moved by weasels to a hunting lodge on the southeast side of the draw but remained here only a short time because enemy patrol activity became very aggressive and there was insufficient personnel to provide adequate security. The Regimental Commander moved part of this group to the 1st Battalion Command Post in Kommerscheidt until an adequate shelter could be set up in the woods. While the command post was operating in the hunting lodge, Lt. Col. Flood, 3rd Battalion Commander, was wounded while waiting for orders. (27)

In the afternoon prior to the moving of the command post, Lt. Col. Locket, Regimental Executive Officer, while enroute to a forward battalion command post, was captured by a German patrol as his party crossed the Kall River. Accompanying Lt. Col. Locket were Captain Montgomery, Regimental S-2, and two photographers who were detailed from US First Army Headquarters to make a pictorial record of this action. Captain Montgomery was wounded in the skirmish but the patrol later abandoned him in one of the many log bunkers in the area. Later he managed to work his way to the road where he was picked up and evacuated. (28)

The 2nd Battalion in the meantime continued to hold its positions in Vossenack in the face of the precision fire of the enemy artillerymen. A counterattack at 1430 hours was beaten back with no loss of ground. (29)

In addition to the identification of the 1055th Regiment of the 89th Division, the 60th and 156th Panzer Grenadier Regiments of the 116th Panzer Division were also identified as new arrivals to this front. (30)

In the north the 109th Infantry made only small gains in its attack on the town of Hurtgen; advancing through minefields under heavy artillery fire. (31)

(27) Personal knowledge (28) Letter from Col. Peterson; Personal knowledge; (29) A-4, P. 292; (30) A-4, P. 292; A-3, P. 69; A-2, P. 91 (31) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 292

7 The 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry enveloped the enemy's flank and succeeded in pocketing a section of the line of fortifications. (32)

In this 24 hour period V Corps artillery fired 8054 rounds and the Tank-Destroyer units fired 2500 rounds in support of the division. (33)

The unstable situation of the 4th of November was only slightly improved on the 5th of November when 8 medium tanks and 7 tank-destroyers traversed the Kall Valley. During the day the depleted remnants of the 1st and 3rd Battalions improved and consolidated their positions when they were not warding off small localized attacks or "sweating out" the numerous heavy artillery concentrations. The newly arrived armor knocked out several enemy tanks. It was evident that Kommerscheidt, being commanded by high ground on three sides, was not a good defensive position. In addition the enemy had infiltrated down the Valley of the Kall and was constantly threatening the only supply route, which, due to the rain and the snow, had become almost impassable. Three tanks had already thrown their tracks in an effort to cross the draw. The engineers spent most of their days and nights fighting off or preparing to fight off these infiltrations, consequently there was little time remaining for them to repair or improve the trail. (34)

ORGANIZATION OF TASK FORCE RIPPLE

Late in the afternoon of the 5th of November, General Cota, Commanding General of the 28th Infantry Division, ordered that Task Force Ripple be organized and given the mission of attacking through the 112th Infantry and retaking Schmidt on the 6th of November. Upon the recapture of Schmidt the task force would set up road blocks and prepare to hold the town until the 112th could relieve them. The task force upon relief would then prepare to attack in the direction of Steckenborn. Task Force Ripple was composed of the 3rd Battalion of the 110th Infantry (approximately 350 men), Companies "A" and "C" with one platoon of Company "B" of the 707th Tank Battalion, and a detachment of the 893rd Tank-Destroyer Battalion. (35)

(32) A-2, P. 90; (33) A-4, P. 292; (34) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 294; Letter from Col. Peterson; Personal knowledge (35) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 294

The 2nd Battalion in Vossenack shook off two enemy counterattacks as it was slowly being gnawed away by artillery fire. (36)

The forward echelon of the Regimental Command Post was "dug in" about 800 yards northwest of Kommerscheidt, in the area of Company "C" which was in 1st Battalion reserve. (37)

The 109th and 110th Infantry made bitterly contested gains in their sectors. The 110th Infantry was involved in the arduous task of reducing the forest fortifications. (38)

The fighter-bombers of the 9th AAF strafed and bombed Schmidt where the enemy appeared to be assembling for a major attack on Kommerscheidt. (39)

On 6 November 1944 at 0200 hours Task Force Ripple moved from its assembly area toward the Vossenack - Kommerscheidt trail; keeping in the edge of the woods so as to avoid the artillery fire that was falling in Vossenack. Lt. Col. Ripple planned to use the present front line of the company in position just west of Kommerscheidt as the line of departure for the attack on Schmidt. As the task force attempted to cross the stone bridge over the Kall River, it was fired upon by infiltrated enemy and therefore had to fight its way to the positions of the 1st and 3rd Battalions. The armored elements of the task force remained in the vicinity of Vossenack until the trail could be cleared. Prior to the arrival of the task force the 1st and 3rd Battalions began to receive very heavy artillery fire that was coupled with fire from self-propelled guns and small arms on their positions. It was evident that the enemy was waiting for the task force to attack because it appeared that every gun had rezeroed in on Kommerscheidt and every observer had his attention focused on the area and fired at anything that moved to the front of the town. The impracticability of the attack of the task force was soon realized and was called off. The task force moved into and prepared a defensive position to the right of Company "C". (40)

(36) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 294; (37) Personal knowledge (38) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 296; (39) A-4, P. 296; (40) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 296, A-3, P. 69; Personal knowledge

The "Shell Happy" 2nd Battalion in Vossenack was attacked twice but both assaults were beaten off; however, the increased volume of direct fire from self-propelled guns added to the ever increasing pressure of the infantry attacks forced the battalion to withdraw to the church in the center of the town. Here the battalion was reorganized and was reinforced as follows: 146th Engineer (C) Battalion in the town, 20th and 1340th Engineer (C) Battalions on a line south of the town extending to the east side of the stone bridge across the Kall River, and that put the 2nd Battalion in positions along the north edge of the town. The 20th Engineer (C) Battalion had the mission of trying to keep the trail across the Kall open as it was the only line of communications between the troops in Kommerscheidt and those in Vossenack. Counterattacks continued but the positions as they were reenforced held. (41)

The situation in the 112th sector was critical. The ever increasing fury of the enemy attacks was taking a heavy toll on men and material. The armor of the 707th Tank Battalion and the 893 Tank-Destroyer Battalion was slowly being made ineffective due to the concentrated fire placed on them in the exposed positions they were forced to utilize. The road between Vossenack and Kommerscheidt which was inadequate at the start of the attack became an obstacle when it became soaked by the rain and snow of the prevailing bad weather. The other roads were so deep in mud that traffic had to be kept to an absolute minimum. The physical and mental condition of the men on position was anything but desirable. They were just existing; they were cold, soaked to the skin by the rain and clinging wet snow, and miserable. The constant threat of counterattack and the methodically pounding of the position by an ever increasing volume of massed enemy artillery fire made sleep scarce and casualties high. Replacements joined the fight and were evacuated before the squad leaders got to know their first names. (42)

During the day a self-propelled gun that was located some where near Brandenburg had laterally bracketted the shallow dug out that served as the forward Regimental Command Post and had had one round short when a P-38 loaded with a "Blaze Bomb" dived and bombed the enemy position and silenced the gun. Many drawn and weary faces who had heard the aircraft go into (41) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 296; (42) A-4, P. 296; Personal knowledge

its dive and had watched the effect of the bomb, took another glance at the plane and mutely blessed and thanked this unknown pilot for taking a thorn out of their backs. The P-47's bombed and strafed Schmidt in an effort to disrupt the assembly of troops that were preparing for the attack on Kommer-scheidt. (43)

In the north the 109th Infantry made little progress in its attack; meeting the usual murderous curtain of fire that the enemy laid down in front of their barbed wire and minefields. (44)

At 1500 hours the 12th Regimental Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division was attached to the 28th Division and plans were made for the relief of the 109th Infantry on the 7 November 1944. (45)

The records show that V Corps' artillery had fired 15,000 rounds and that the Tank-Destroyers had fired 1650 rounds or the equivalent of over 10 rounds per minute for this 24 hour period. (46)

The 7th of November was initiated at 0800 hours by the 146th Engineer (C) Battalion attacking toward the east end of Vossenack in an effort to regain the ground that had been lost the day before. The attack was supported by tanks and artillery ~~but~~ ^{and} as was the usual case in this German artillery impact area, the enemy laid a blanket of shells on the attackers. The attack was successful and most of the ground was regained. (47)

The 2nd Battalion of the 109th Infantry was ordered to relieve the 2nd Battalion of the 112th Infantry in Vossenack which it completed by 2040 hours. The badly mauled 2nd Battalion retired to an assembly area west of Germeter where it was to be rehabilitated. (48)

The morning of the 7th of November also brought the much anticipated attack on Kommerscheidt. Although the first attempt to seize the town was heavily supported by tanks and artillery fire it failed to accomplish its mission. It was a different ending when the enemy attacked at 1430 behind a heavy curtain of artillery fire and supported by 15 to 20 tanks; the fight that ensued was bitterly fought but the overwhelming odds could not be surmounted. The fragments of the two battalions withdrew after their positions

(43) A-2, P.90; A-4, P.296; Personal knowledge (44) A-4, P.296; (45) A-4, P. 296; (46) A-4, P. 296; (47) A-2, P.91; A-3, P. 69; A-4, P. 296; (48) A-2, P.90; A-4, P.296.

became untenable to the line held by Company "C" and Task Force Ripple. (49)

Major Hazlett who had commanded the combined 1st and 3rd Battalions in Kommerscheidt and most of his staff were listed among the missing. Included in this list were Captain Martin, Captain Driscoll (Artillery Officer), W/Sgt McCann, and many other seasoned veterans. Lt. Col. Peterson in a personal letter written after the war stated, "The only thing that held us in Kommerscheidt as long as we remained was Major Hazletts courage and the superior cooperation from two artillery Captains (who were both killed by point blank 88mm fire in Kommerscheidt.). The tanks and infantry were held back by the artillery fire directed by those two great artillery officers. They called for so many concentrations that I believe that those in the rear figured they were going crazy and toward the end (before the artillery radio was destroyed) the artillery battalions were unable to give the support the observers requested. Apparently we failed to consider that other units on the front needed support." (50)

Prior to the loss of Kommerscheidt the division issued orders to form another task force with Brigadier General Davis, Assistant Division Commander, in command. This task force would incorporate Task Force Ripple and would have the mission of recapturing Schmidt. Before Task Force Davis could be fully organized the Corps Commander ordered that due to the precarious position of the troops on the south side of the Kall River, they would be withdrawn. Task Force Davis was given the mission of protecting the withdrawal of these troops on the night of 8 - 9 November 1944. (51)

The tank-destroyers were credited with 5 enemy tanks knocked out but of the armor that had traversed the Kall Valley only one tank and two tank-destroyers remained operational. One of the tank-destroyers was lost when a mortar shell hit inside the open turret. (52)

The aid station which had been operating in the Kall Valley was captured by German patrols once a day for the past two days. Captain Madden, the

(49) A-2, P. 91; A-3, P. 70; A-4, P. 296; (50) A-4, P. 296; Letter from Col. Peterson
(51) A -2, P. 91; A-4, P. 296; (52) A-4, P. 298; Personal knowledge

Regimental Chaplain, who could speak excellent German and who was present said that the patrol leader would search the aid station for weapons; then ask him if they had enough food and medical supplies. After being informed that the aid station was well supplied, the satisfied patrol leader would move his patrol down the valley and continue on his mission. Captain Madden said that within an hour an American patrol usually consisting of engineers would approach from the same direction and continue the way of the German patrol. (53)

During the afternoon of the 7th of November a coded message was received at the forward command post of the 112th Infantry which ordered Lt. Col. Peterson to report to the division command post. The Regimental Commander although reluctant left the position with two men and a jeep and started down the trail that led to Vossenack but at the bottom of the draw the party was ambushed. Col. Peterson and Pfc Seiler were able to get away only to be cut down a few seconds later. Col. Peterson was seriously wounded but after being left for dead he managed to drag himself out of the draw where he was picked up and carried back to the Division Command Post. Here he learned that the message he had received was not sent by the Division Commander. Who sent that message is still one of the unsolved mysteries of the war. (54)

On the other sections of the front the units continued to make small gains against a much determined enemy. The 110th Infantry was occupied in cleaning out the pockets of resistance that it had created by its flanking maneuver. (55)

THE WITHDRAWAL

On 8 November 1944 the front was relatively quiet with only spasmodic artillery fire to remind the alert defenders of the enemy's potential. The aggressive probing of the line had practically ceased but since the counter-attack was the enemy's strongest and most likely capability, it was the (53) A-2, P. 92; (54) Personal knowledge; (55) A-2, P. 90; A-4, P. 298.

constant threat to the remaining men on the south side of the Kall River. Lt. Col. Ripple, aided by the very capable Major Dana, S-3 of the 112th Infantry, and a few other officers, had made a tentative plan of withdrawal which could be put into effect once the order was received. It was at the completion of this plan that one of the men just outside the shallow log covered hole that served as a command post was heard to exclaim, "Holy Hell, here comes a chicken colonel from the 5th Armored Division!". The unshaven, mud caked faces of the small command group that had been aging a year for every day that they had spent on this position suddenly came to animated life. Although nothing was said at the moment, the thoughts of the men present were the same; this meant that help was on its way. The colonel introduced himself as Colonel G. M. Nelson and stated that he was assuming command of the 112th Infantry. The Colonel had led a patrol through the draw so that he could take command of the withdrawal of his regiment. When asked as to the strength of the task force, Col. Ripple told him there were approximately 350 effectives and about 50 wounded of which 20 could walk. When informed of the plan for the withdrawal, Col. Nelson approved, and the plan was put into action. (56)

Task Force Davis with the mission of covering the withdrawal had assigned the task of securing the draw to the 3rd Battalion, 109th Infantry. This mission was completed by 1730 after which time the shattered remnants of Task Force Ripple started their withdrawal. Company "C" had been left as the covering force with instructions to withdraw at a designated time. The major problem of evacuation was accomplished by having the first elements to withdraw carry the wounded and the other elements carry as much of the equipment as possible. As much of the equipment that had to be abandoned and could be destroyed without attracting the enemy's attention to the movement was demolished. This night withdrawal was undetected by the enemy and although six men were wounded by mortar fire and control was lost in the thick woods, it was considered very successful. (57)

(56) A-2, P. 91; A-4, P. 298; Letter from Col. Nelson; Personal knowledge.

(57) A-2, P. 91; Personal knowledge

With the exception of the 110th Infantry which gained ground in its attack to the south, the other elements of the division held their positions. (58)

On the morning of the 8th of November only 24 tanks out of the original 54 tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion remained operational. On the same date the tank-destroyer had only 12 destroyers left out of their original 36. (59)

On the 9th of November the personnel of the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 112th Infantry were retired to an assembly area west of Germeter where they were to be rehabilitated and reorganized. (60)

With the 110th Infantry continuing its attack south and the 109th Infantry with the supporting engineers holding their positions in Vossenack, the 12th Infantry gained a position a few hundred yards south of the town of Hurtgen. (61)

On the 10 of November, operations were to be suspended by the 28th Division in this area except when necessary to secure the Kall River line. (62)

The G-2 estimate of this date indicated the 6 Battalions of the 275th Infantry Division, 116th Panzer Division, and 89th Infantry Division were confronting the US 28th Infantry Division.

On this date the 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry relieved the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry in Vossenack. (63)

From 11th to 13th of November positions were consolidated and minor counterattacks were repulsed. (64)

THE RELIEF

On 14 November 1944, V Corps Field Order Number 32 ordered the 28th Division to interchange positions with the US 8th Infantry Division which had been holding a quiet sector of the front from Lutzkampen to Ettelbruck, Germany. On this date at 1540 hours the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 112th Infantry moved south and after being relieved by the 2nd Ranger Battalion, the 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry followed at 2345 hours. (65)

The operations for the 28th Infantry Division in the Hurtgen Forest area were closed when the interchange of the divisions was completed on the 16 November 1944.

(58) A-2, P. 91; A-4, P. 298 (59) A-4, P. 298; (60) A-4, P. 298; (61) A-4, P. 298
(62) A-3, P. 70; A-4, P. 298; (63) A-4, P. 307; (64) A-2, P. 91; A-4, P. 307; (65) A-2, P. 91; 22

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

In an analysis of the operations of the 112th Infantry in the Hurtgen Forest it is immediately evident that all the higher commanders involved were aware of the special conditions that had to be established before this attack could be successful. These prerequisites, the neutralization of enemy observation from the commanding ridges, the isolation of the battlefield, and the improvement of the trail (G-2 could not verify its existence) leading from Vossenack to Kommerscheidt so that supporting tanks could traverse the draw without any difficulty, were the cruxes to the accomplishment of this mission. It was not long after the assault began that the units of the 112th Infantry and those of the other regiments of the division knew that none of these provisos had been adequately surmounted. The supply and evacuation problem which was to be relieved by the use of weasels faltered when direct fire weapons on the ridge used them for ducks in the shooting gallery of Vossenack. Of the original 47 weasels received, 22 were lost in action. The failure to provide an adequate line of communication to the troops in Schmidt choked the flow of the much needed heavy support weapons and eventually threw the tide of battle to the enemy. The battalion in Schmidt had taken all the security measures at its disposal which would have held the position against any normal infantry attack, but its hastily spread mines and rocket launchers were not commensurate to the attack it received. The enemy under the cover of overcast skies was able to build up his strength in men and armor from day to day and by his tanks and artillery using precision fire he was able to slowly eliminate the troops who were forced to occupy exposed positions. The constant hammering of artillery and the overshadowing threat of counterattack sapped the fighting strength from these veterans and left them exhausted; consequently, the casualty rate greatly increased. (66)

The artillery forward observers who shared the rifleman's foxhole earned their niche in the hall of greatness when by well adjusted artillery fire they were able to disorganize enemy counterattacks before they penetrated the fighting positions. (67)

(66) A-2, P. 92; A-3, P. 168 & P. 170; A-4, P. 296; A-7 (67) A-4, P. 296; Letter from Col. Peterson

The series of skirmishes fought by the combat engineers in the Kall Valley reemphasized the fact that these troops were not adequately trained in the adaptations of the normal fighting technique required to fight successfully in woods. The engineers were not the only ones who lacked this training for from a captured document published by the 183rd Volks Grenadier Division the following statement is extracted, "In combat in wooded area the American showed himself completely unfit." (68)

In this action the reinforcement system of the army proved itself inadequate. ~~Men~~, Replacements, were rushed into the line and before they could become thoroughly indoctrinated to fire they were wounded and evacuated. The squad leaders were unable to help these men over the hump of battle initiation and many replacements became battle fatigued before they fired their first shot at the enemy. If these individuals could be organized into small fighting teams with battle tested leaders they would be able to fulfill their intended mission. The time wasting formalities of introductions and of learning the capabilities of new personalities would be eliminated from the battlefield where time can be put to a better use. (69)

One of the mysteries of this action is the origin of the message which ordered the Regimental Commander to report to the division command post. Although this message was received by the attached communication personnel of the Division Signal Company it presumably was not authenticated. A grim reminder to combat commanders to have every message that is received authenticated. (70)

The withdrawal plans of the task force followed the doctrine of simplicity and completeness coupled with the ever important qualification of secrecy. To facilitate control the men moved in files with no interval, but once they entered the closely packed woods and started their descent of the steep sides of the ravine control was lost. But in spite of this the well laid plans made this a very successful withdrawal. (71)

(68) A-3, P. 166; A-4, P. 296; (69) A-2, P. 92; (70) Personal knowledge
(71) A-2, P. 91.

This operation had decimated a first class division. The casualty figure for the Hurtgen Forest Fighting varies considerably in the different reports; one source lists the total loss to be 248 officers and 5452 enlisted men. The 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry alone received 515 reinforcements 6 days after the start of the attack. (72)

Equipment losses were staggering although the actual figures are not available. (73)

The other side of the ledger cannot be verified but intelligence records show 43 tanks and 7 self-propelled guns disabled or destroyed, an estimated 4000 Germans killed or wounded, and over 1000 prisoners taken. (74)

Mission not accomplished.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned from this operation are:

1. Prior to an operation through heavily wooded terrain, troops must be thoroughly trained in the variances of fighting technique ^{in woods} necessary to successfully combat the defense lines embedded therein.
2. Immediate and rapid organization of an objective once it has been taken must be accomplished with the same vivaciousness as that of the attack.
3. Rocket launchers as the primary means of defense against the armor of an infantry-tank team are not adequate due to the short range of the weapon.
4. Routes of communication must be made adequate to fit the needs of the attacking echelon.
5. Sufficient troops must be made available for the rotation for rehabilitation of units which are subjected to severe weather or hazardous conditions for extended periods. The disregard of this requisite will greatly increase the casualty rate of the unit.

(72) A-1, P. 239 & 307; A-3, P. 167; (73) A-3, P. 170 & 172; A-4, P. 298;
(74) A-2, P. 92.

6. When air power is depended upon to isolate the local battlefield, plans must be flexible so as to include supplementary provisions in case a rapid change in weather prevents the air force from accomplishing its mission.

7. Replacements (reenforcements) should be trained as a unit of at least squad strength and when conditions permit they should be joined to combat units between actions and not during actions.

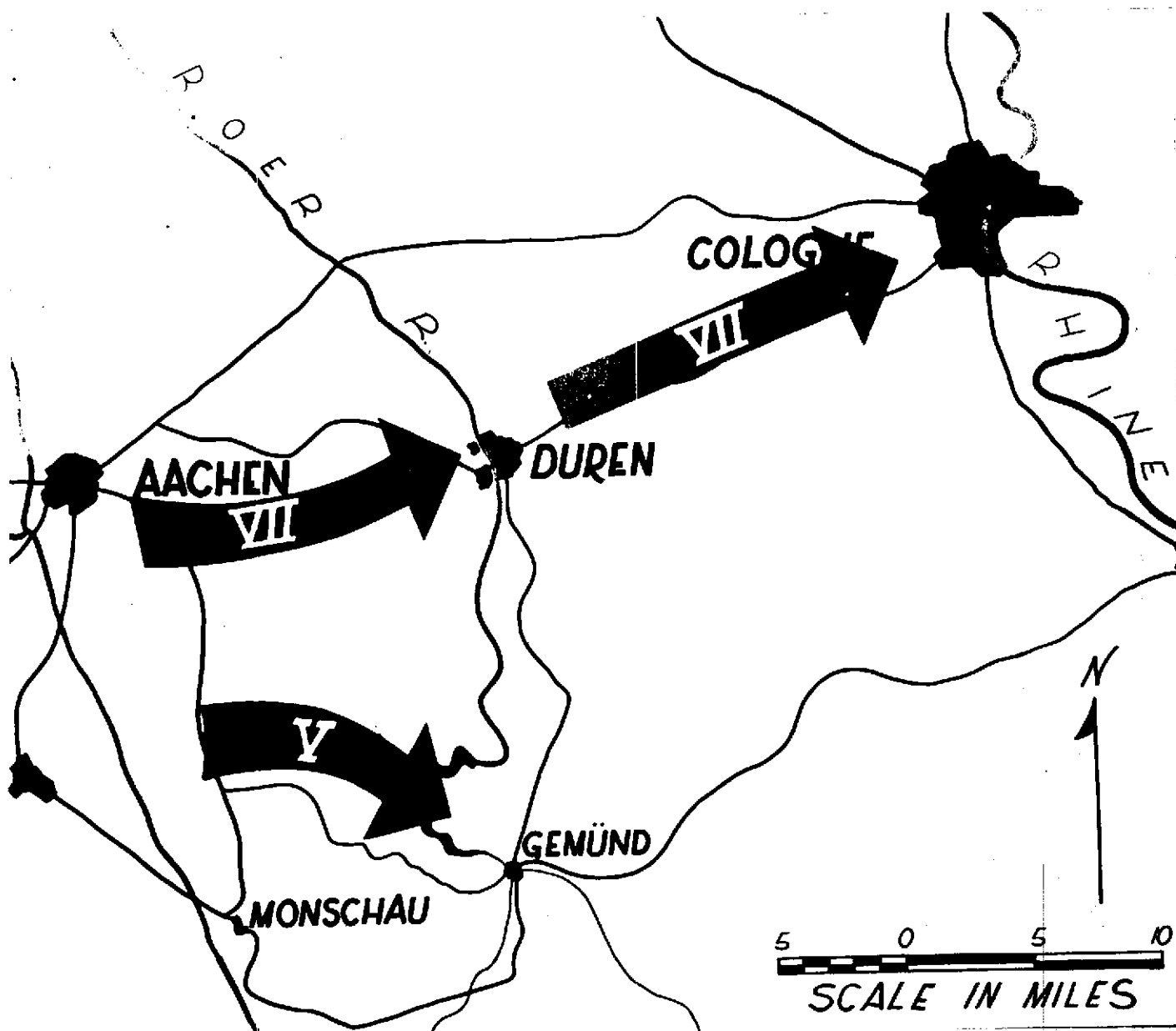
8. Secrecy of plans is essential in a withdrawal action.

9. Due to the extreme difficulty in maintaining control, plans for a night withdrawal in wooded terrain must be not only simple but complete down to the most minute detail and must be disseminated to every man of the command.

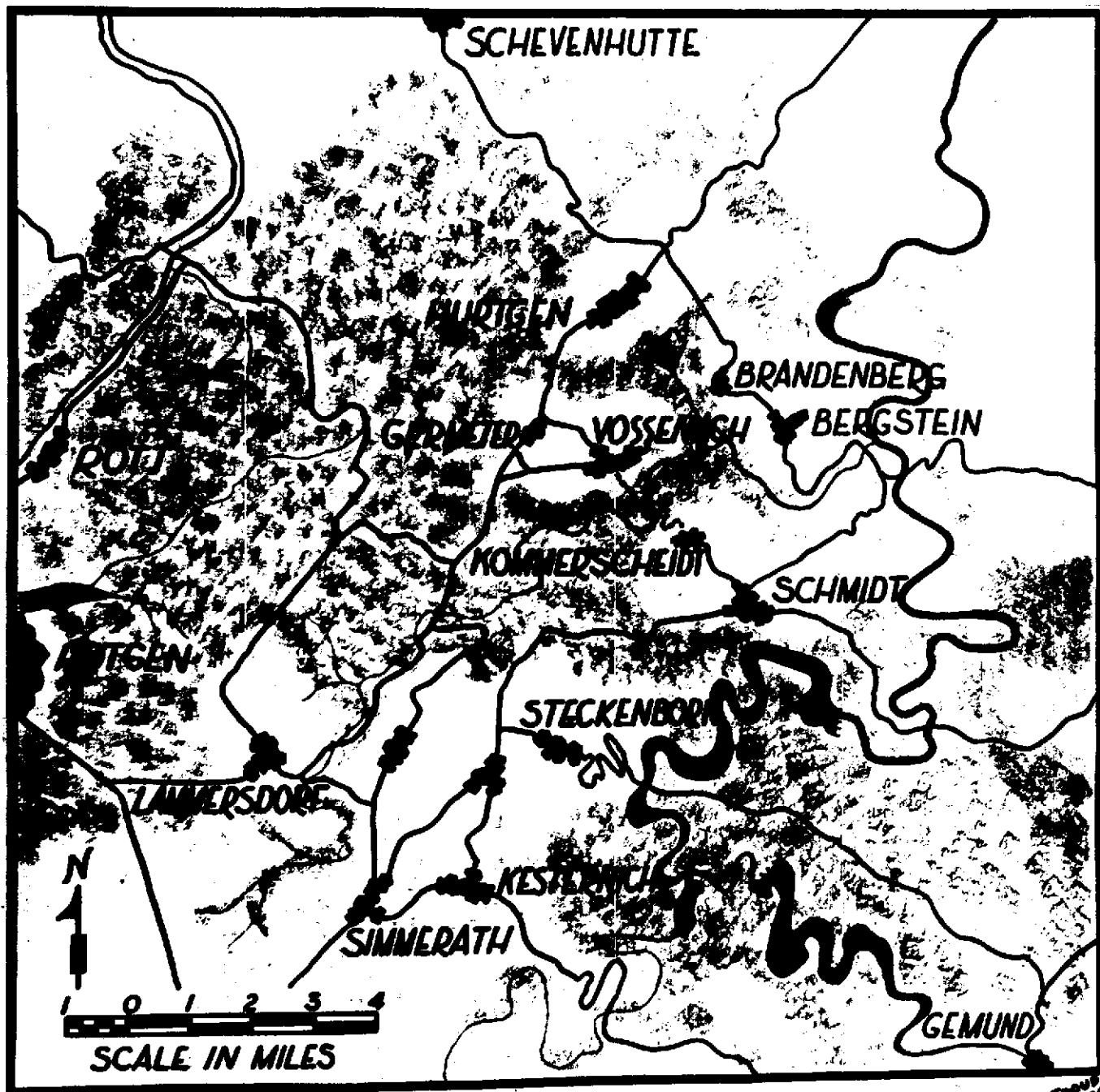
10. Artillery forward observers with the assaulting echelon can effectively stave off counterattacks by observed artillery fire.

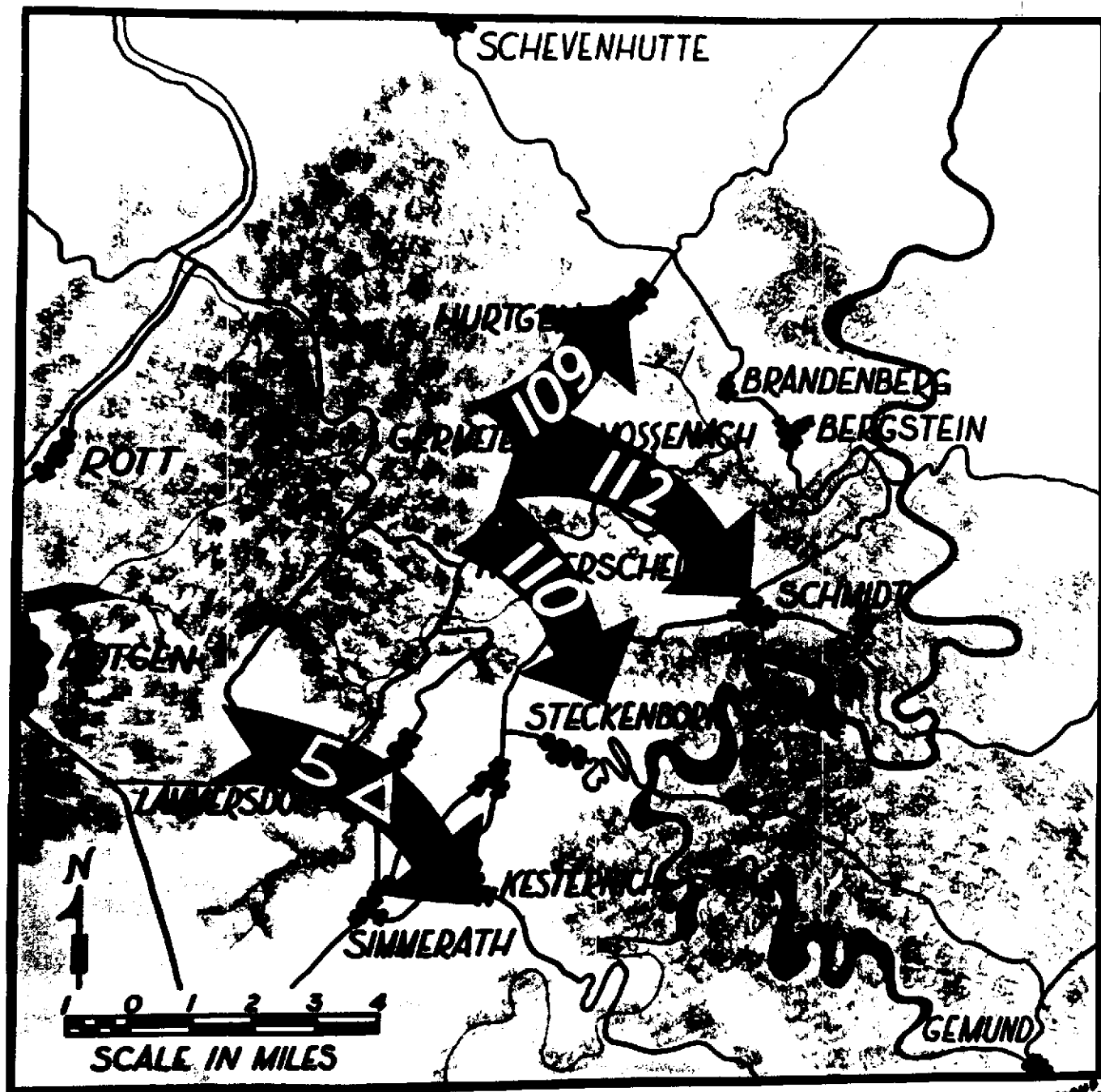
11. The practice of authenticating all messages received must be impressed upon the minds of all combat commanders, their staffs, and their communication personnel.

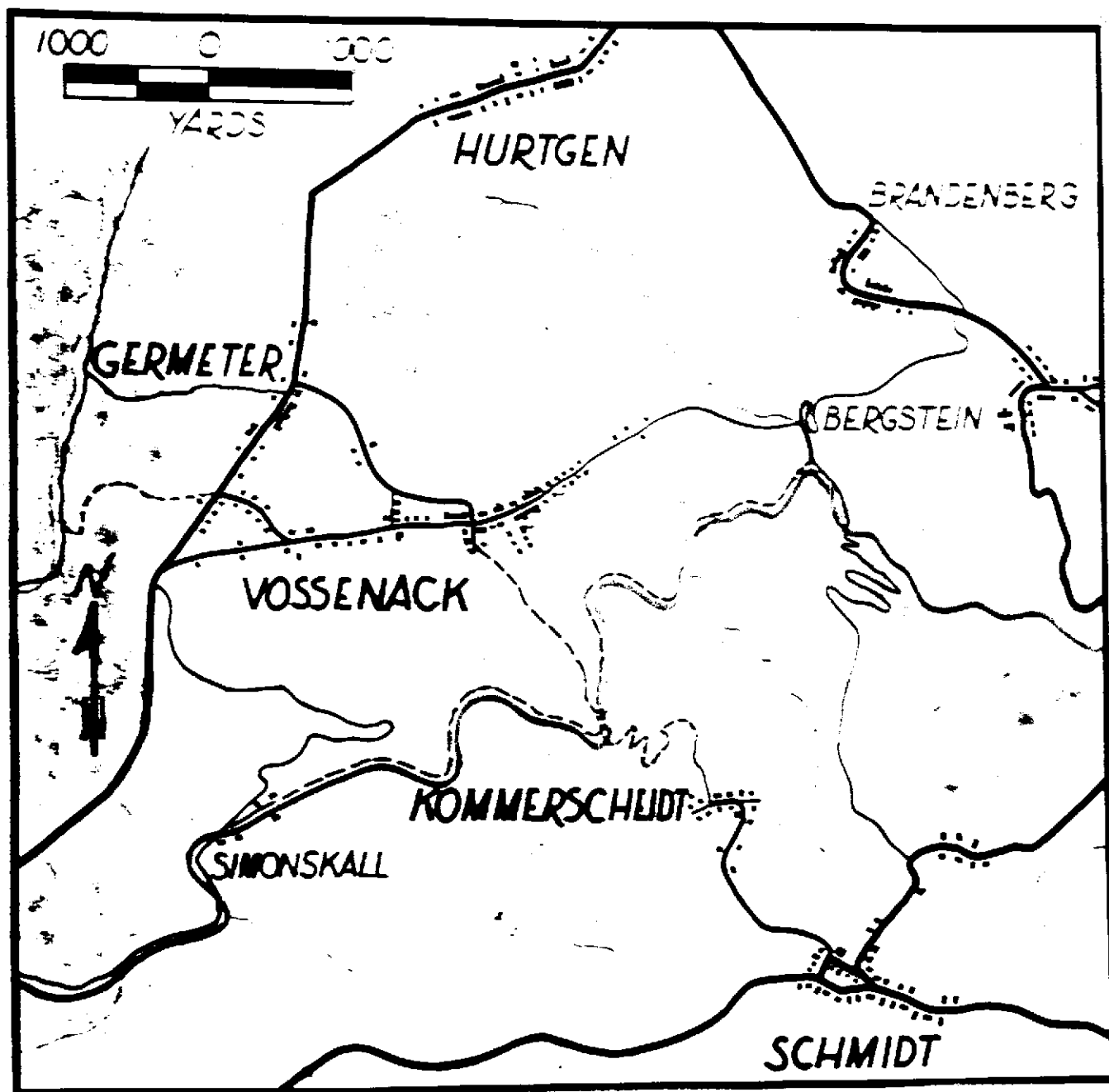
12. Combat engineers can be used as infantrymen but cannot be expected to perform the two jobs simultaneously.



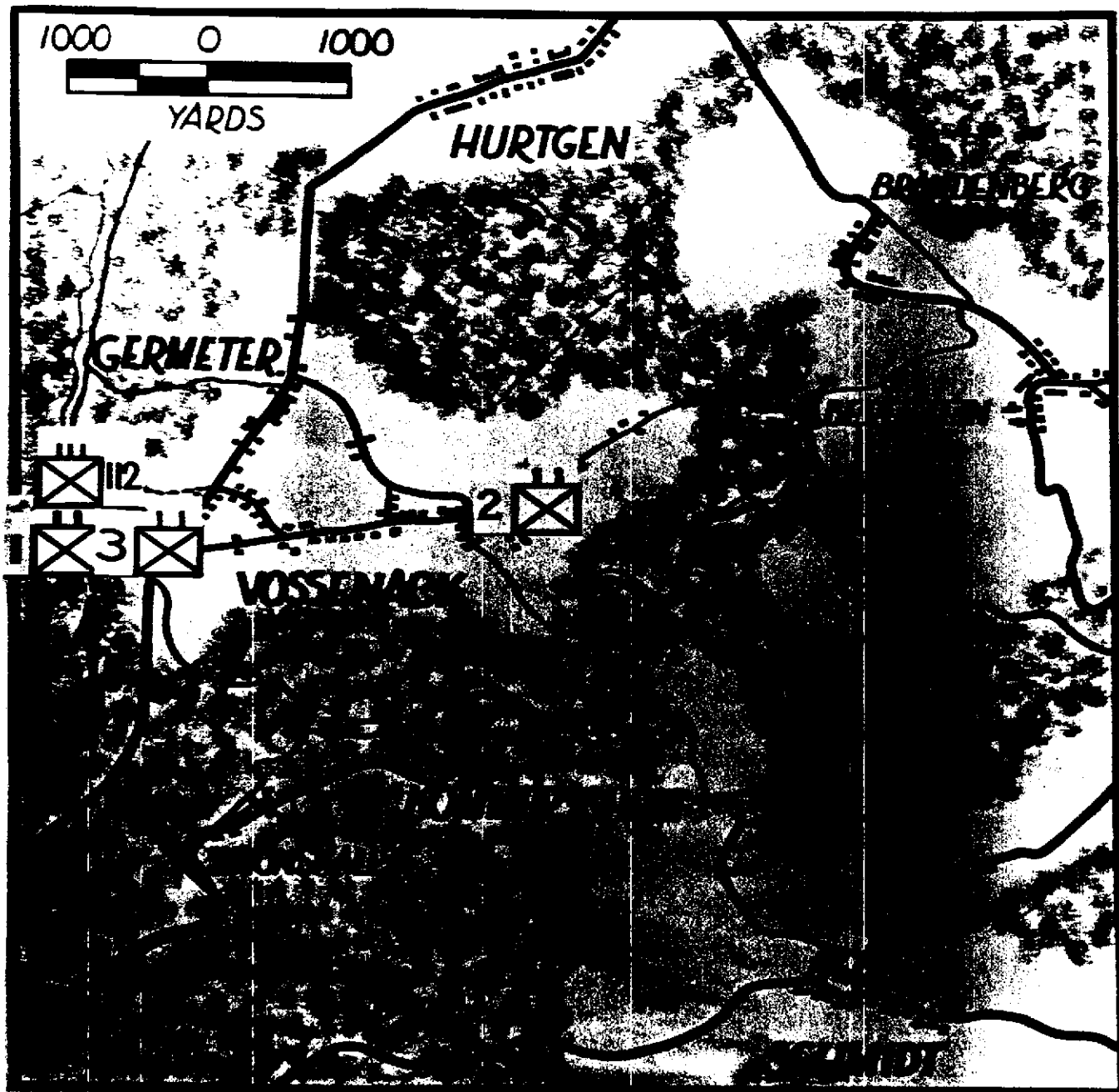
MAP A







MAP C



MAP C-1

